Being eleven years old, Minecraft has seen many communities rise and fall over the years, but believe it or not, there are servers that have existed for nearly a decade. Servers that have been around for that long are bound to have a rich history behind them, and each community has their own story. Many of these communities have introduced their own type of gameplay and inspired a new way to play the game. This is the story of one of these servers, TotalFreedom - a server that will have been online for a decade in November 2020. How did we get here? Well, to find out we have to travel back in time to the Alpha version of the game.

On October 29th, 2010, Minecraft Alpha version 1.2.0 was made available, and players were able to explore the newly added dimension - “The Nether”. The Nether was a version of hell modified to fit the look and feel of the game. One Minecraft player, markbyron, thought that it would be cool to open a server for players to explore the Nether. However, due to technical limitations at the time, transportation between the overworld and the nether was not possible while in multiplayer. So on November 11th, 2010, markbyron launched two separate servers at the same time. One of them contained the Nether, and the other one was a simple overworld landscape. Markbyron advertised the server around the forums of the time, and the community began to steadily grow. The Nether server had far more players than the Earth server, although the Earth server did have some players that wanted to build in peace.

Both servers continued to operate until May 11th, 2011, when Beta version 1.6 was released, fixing the issues with the Nether in multiplayer. This negated the need for two servers, and the Earth and Hell servers merged into one. The result was a server with both a survival aspect and building aspect (Overworld and Hell respectively), where players could switch between the two at will. This was the start of allowing players OP privileges. Later in 2011, a huge addition was made; The development and deployment of TotalFreedomMod - a custom server plugin made by Madgeek that allowed normal players to be given extra operator permissions while not sacrificing server functionality. To this day, TotalFreedomMod is regularly updated and serves as the backbone of the server. Normally, operator permissions are reserved for the approved moderators of a server. If a bad apple gets moderation powers, it can spell chaos for a community. However, being an op also allows players to use many different building tools to create incredible structures, and a variety of other fun activities. Madgeek’s TotalFreedomMod allowed for all players to be given many of these permissions, while also keeping the server safe from harmful admin tools. Over time, this plugin became the backbone of the server, and one of the main reasons players would stay.

In 2012, one of the greatest features ever to come to the server was made. The creation of the first official TotalFreedom forum by Finest95 on August 8th, 2012, which became the central hub for off-server communication. Everything from suggestions to requests was done over this forum. Over eight long years, this forum developed into a gargantuan archive of server history and culture, most of

which is still accessible to this day. The result of the forums' creation was monumental. Regular players were able to voice their thoughts and share their experiences more efficiently. What used to be an informal staff roster handpicked by markbyron turned into an official application process, where the outcome was decided by publicly viewable votes made in real-time. The suggestions category was a highlight of the forum, as it allowed players to push for changes or additions to the features and management of the server.

Throughout 2013 and 2014, improvements were made to the server plugins, and the player count continued to rise. During this time, it was not uncommon for the server to fill every slot. In December of 2013, an admin named Robolawrence posted a video about the server that currently has almost fifty thousand views, making it the most viewed video about TotalFreedom to ever be made. In 2014, the custom TotalFreedomMod plugin was released to GitHub, allowing anyone to create their own version of TotalFreedom. Many people took advantage of this, and started their own FreeOp style servers. However, most of these servers were short lived and only a few gained traction. Nonetheless, players would continue to create their own spin-off servers for years to come, proving that many people were inspired by the community.

However, everything was not as rosy as it seemed. The server owner, markbyron, was constantly criticized for deleting posts on the forum in an effort to reduce what he called "drama". In addition to completely deleting threads that expressed annoyance with how the server was managed, he would sometimes remove staff members or even ban people if he felt they were causing a disruption, even if they weren't breaking any specific rules. One of the most infamous examples of this was the conflict between markbyron, and a staff member named UYScutix. UYScutix was known for making very long posts on admin applications and other requests, that in many cases were able to sway the votes of others. Although it was very controversial, markbyron gave UYScutix two options: stop commenting on suggestions and applications altogether, or be permanently banned from the server. UYScutix chose to leave, angry and bitter at the censoring of his opinions.

In June 2017, the community was caught off guard when markbyron resigned from his ownership position. He appointed an admin named Windows_ as his successor. Although he was no longer the owner, he continued to be active in the community for much of 2017. Windows faced his first obstacle as owner very quickly after being chosen, when former admin UYScutix began to cause trouble again. Unhappy with how the upper level staff were acting, he attempted to gain the attention of the community by performing denial of service attacks on the server itself, members, and staff. According to him, the goal was to make TotalFreedom a more democratic place where players don't abuse and regular members can voice their opinions without being punished. He began to create videos in the style of the hacktivist group Anonymous, with a person in a mask on screen while a text-to-speech program read from a script. These videos ranged from being somewhat comical to downright harassment.

During this time, many admins began to mysteriously be removed from their position with no explanation. Eventually, it was revealed that the Discord account of UYScutix had been breached and all the messages he had ever sent or received were released. As it turned out, a substantial number of admins had been secretly giving UYScutix access to the IP addresses of players, as well as giving him information usually only accessible to staff. The Discord breach marked the quick and decisive end of what would be called the “TotalFreedom Revolution” and did not cause many changes to the system, and instead promoted mistrust between members.
Following the Revolution, mistrust of the highest ranking staff began to spread. The absolute secrecy regarding details of staff involved with UYScutix caused many people to become skeptical of their actions. This suspicion grew slowly all the way up until late 2018, when it became apparent to most that the executive admin officer, a player named infamas97, was unwilling to communicate with anyone. Several players called for infamas to resign from his position, however the only response to these requests were apology threads made by infamas that were locked to prevent responses. A large group of staff threatened to resign if infamas was not removed before the new year. It was around this time when the server owner, Windows, became extremely inactive. He would go days without making a single post or even signing in. As a result, there was no formal response to the requests for the removal of infamas. Just days before christmas, a forum admin named Cowgomooo12 forcefully removed inFAmas from his position. Shortly after, Windows failed to pay for the server or respond to messages. This prompted a group of admins to draft and implement the Ownership policy, a procedure in the case of needing a replacement owner.

The policy was invoked during February of 2019, and CreeperSeth was elected to the position of owner. Over a year after UYScutix’s revolution failed, one of the most democratic actions in the history of the server took place through sheer will of the community. For the first half of 2019, the server continued smoothly - receiving a hardware upgrade, and a responsive owner that brought positive changes to the server. CreeperSeth turned out to be quite popular among players, as unlike markbyron and Windows, he actively interacted with players and showed his personality.

However once again, there were issues behind the scenes. Because Seth disliked being reclusive, he naturally had a social group. His status as the owner meant he could grant his close friends high level powers within the server without consulting anyone. This included making one of them Co-Owner, and the other got full access to modify the forum. Several of these individuals were known for spouting blatantly racist remarks. In addition, evidence was released in early 2020 that showed these individuals abusing their powers to annoy players in-game, and even permanently ban people without giving them their due process. the outrage among the community, because of their friendship, Seth was reluctant to hand out punishments to them. This ultimately proved a moot point

as the individuals involved in the racism and abuse were removed from the team by the admin officer.

Following the incident, the server continued smoothly. Many changes were made to bring new functionality to the server, such as switching from the original forum to a new software. This proved to be a double edged sword, as many people pointed out it gave Seth unrestricted access to the forum database - and eventually, it went wrong as Seth installed a plugin that allowed him to sign in to anyone’s forum account. Once again, the community began the vote off process - however it was cut short when Seth purged all assets of the server, including both forums, and the discord server. Instead of completely falling apart, the community came together more than ever before to work on rebuilding the server. An old player named Wild1145 hosted the server while restoration efforts (called the phoenix project) took place. TotalFreedom will face many challenges in the near future, but if anything is certain, it’s that the community is capable, and is also the most valuable part of the server.